

BOOK REVIEW

South Australian Wattles

Whibley, D.J.E. with assistance from Donner, N.N. Illustrated by L. Dutkiewicz. 'Acacias of South Australia', 1980, Government Printer, South Australia.

This "Handbook of the Flora and Fauna of South Australia" maintains the high standard of the series. It is an attractive publication with a colourful, flexible but durable cover, good quality paper, clear type and plenty of illustrations.

The scope of the book is explained in the "Introduction" and "Explanation of the Text". Following these sections there are two keys to the species of *Acacia* in South Australia, an illustrated one and a conventional dichotomous indented one. The former is useful but distinctions between some species in Group 3 are not at all obvious, largely because of the small size of the illustrations. I tested the conventional key on a number of specimens and found that it worked well.

Ninety-seven species are treated individually, the text covering description, flowering time, occurrence, cultivation and, in some cases, related species. Each species is illustrated by drawings and a habit photograph and there is a distribution map (approx. 1:24,000,000) for each. All information is placed on two facing pages, a great convenience for the user.

The scientific and common name (when there is one) is followed by a reference to the author, place of publication of the name, derivation of the name and synonyms. The descriptions are brief but accurate and adequate for most purposes. Details of flowers are not given but, except for size in a few species such as *Acacia myrtifolia*, unless highly magnified they are of little value in identification. The section on occurrence gives detailed information on the range of the species in South Australia, information which is also given on the distribution map, ecological data, and its occurrence in other states. I found that the notes on related species of great interest. Problems abound in *Acacia* and some of them involving South Australian species are discussed briefly by the author in these notes. For example, notes to *A. aneura*, *A. brachystachya* and *A. ramulosa* draw attention to the difficulty in distinguishing these species from each other and from *A. linophylla*, which may or may not be distinct from *A. ramulosa*.

The author adopts some solutions and refers to literature pertinent to the problem. There are a few species which are in some way doubtful and are mentioned only in notes, but they are indexed.

The book is remarkably free from misprints or other errors. I found only one misprint, a date so obviously wrong that there is no possibility of its misleading anyone, and some mistakes in the occurrence of species. *A. baileyana* is naturalised in Queensland and *A. flexifolia* occurs naturally there, whereas *A. mearnsii* does not occur at all. But none of this information was available to the author and he cannot be blamed for such minor blemishes.

The line drawings complement the text. At first sight they may seem somewhat stiff and stylised, but acacias are harsh plants and deserve bold treatment. With the conventional key and the drawings it is possible, in fact, to identify a species without referring to the description. The low, densely branched species with small uninerved phyllodes are often difficult to distinguish but the drawings to species No.'s 8, 9 and 10 would leave the user in little doubt as to which he had. Again floral details are omitted without detracting from the usefulness of the drawings.

The habit photographs are not up to the high standard of the rest of the book. Some, for example that of *A. calcicola*, are very good indeed, but about half of them are not particularly informative. The colour ones are significantly better than the monochrome ones though only two-thirds are really satisfactory. In many cases this is not the fault of the author, photographer, artist or printer but rather of the subject matter. Many acacias are low dense shrubs with small phyllodes and yellow inflorescences and look very much alike in photographs, even in colour. The use of colour for all photographs would certainly increase their value and would also greatly increase the price of the book. Such a move cannot be justified when the book already contains such useful drawings.

The treatment of individual species is followed by a distribution chart of species, references to works cited in the text, a glossary, and an index. The distribution chart is useful for comparing areas inside and outside of South Australia. It is surprising for example, that 11 of the 25 species recorded from the Lake Eyre region do not occur in Queensland whereas 6 of the 23 species of the contiguous Gregory South District of Queensland do not occur in South Australia. The references, besides being necessary to an understanding of the notes, give the general reader a lead into the literature of *Acacia* in South Australia. The glossary is easy to use and seems to cover all technical terms used, while the index is comprehensive and accurate.

The book is highly recommended to the professional worker, the amateur enthusiast and the layman. South Australians are fortunate to have such a practical and attractive guide to the acacias of their state, and everyone involved in its production is to be congratulated.

Whibley, D.J.E. with assistance from Donner, N.N. 1980 (February 29) 'Acacias of South Australia', pp. 240, 37 coloured plates, 60 monochrome plates, 104 line drawings, 1 map. (Published by Handbooks Committee, printed by Government Printer, South Australia). Paperbound \$7.90.

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